



Laying claim to occupational therapy practice, one rapid review at a time

The Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA) wanted to understand the current occupational therapy research focus areas in South Africa and possibly develop recommendations for occupational therapy priority research areas for the future. The setting of research priorities is seen as an important activity for every organisation¹. The understanding of the research priority areas would assist the occupational therapy profession in developing and providing research-based evidence to support occupational practice in preparation for Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines UHC as ensuring that all people have access to promotive, preventative, curative, rehabilitative and palliative services². As part of the process of preparing for transformed healthcare through the National Health Insurance (NHI) in South Africa, there is a need for the development of treatment guidelines. Treatment guidelines are informed by a systematic review of evidence and an assessment of the benefits and harms of alternative care options. In response to the latter request to formulate guidelines, OTASA commissioned a research project in 2023 that focused on the use of Rapid Reviews in order to provide the necessary research-based evidence to support occupational therapy practice in South Africa. Rapid review methodology was selected as a strategy due to the following benefits it offers: 1) It takes minimal time to identify credible research 2) It produces reliable research evidence in order to support decision making 3) It provides support for treatment approaches, and 4) It is a cost-effective research strategy. Rapid reviews have increased in popularity by various stakeholders including the Cochrane Collaboration, as an evidence-based strategy that allows health policy makers to make decisions in limited timeframes with limited resources^{3, 4}.

Supporting the OTASA initiative, a mapping review by Hendricks, Buchanan and Clark⁵ of research published in this journal, the South African Journal of Occupational Therapy (SAJOT) called for a South African based occupational therapy research strategy to support evidence-based practice. Research conducted by Soeker and Olumide⁶, identified the need to obtain Level 1A and Level 1B occupational therapy researched-based evidence to provide sound evidence of the contribution of the occupational therapy profession to the health and wellbeing of South Africans. They identified specific areas of occupational therapy practice for which high level evidence was needed. In Paediatrics: HIV, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual disability and Long-term health conditions and in Adults: Stroke (CVA), TBI and Spinal cord injury. This edition of SAJOT features the first two of a series of rapid reviews conducted by a team of four researchers over a period of eight months. Van Biljon et al.⁷ provide a comprehensive

description of research evidence in the area of Burns and Van der Walt et al.⁸ provide a thorough description of occupational therapy practice evidence with reference to Autism Spectrum Disorder. The reviews provide evidence that supports the importance of occupational therapy as an intervention to remediate the functional deficits related to the medical conditions mentioned above. Furthermore, the rapid reviews provide direction and recommendations for continued research in the respective areas of practice. Further reviews will be published in subsequent editions of the SAJOT. In conclusion, I would like to urge the occupational therapy community to continue to engage in and publish evidence-based research that highlights the important contribution that we tirelessly make to the lives of all our clients throughout South Africa. Without the presentation of evidence that supports our practice, we may negatively affect the scientific contribution that occupational therapy provides as a profession.

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